

USAWC STRATEGY RESEARCH PROJECT

**CARL VON CLAUSEWITZ AND HIS RELEVANCE AS A CONTEMPORARY  
THEORIST**

by

Captain Belinda Heerwagen  
United States Navy

Tami Biddle, PhD  
Project Adviser

This SRP is submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the Master of Strategic Studies Degree. The U.S. Army War College is accredited by the Commission on Higher Education of the Middle States Association of Colleges and Schools, 3624 Market Street, Philadelphia, PA 19104, (215) 662-5606. The Commission on Higher Education is an institutional accrediting agency recognized by the U.S. Secretary of Education and the Council for Higher Education Accreditation.

The views expressed in this student academic research paper are those of the author and do not reflect the official policy or position of the Department of the Army, Department of Defense, or the U.S. Government.

U.S. Army War College  
CARLISLE BARRACKS, PENNSYLVANIA 17013

## Report Documentation Page

*Form Approved*  
OMB No. 0704-0188

Public reporting burden for the collection of information is estimated to average 1 hour per response, including the time for reviewing instructions, searching existing data sources, gathering and maintaining the data needed, and completing and reviewing the collection of information. Send comments regarding this burden estimate or any other aspect of this collection of information, including suggestions for reducing this burden, to Washington Headquarters Services, Directorate for Information Operations and Reports, 1215 Jefferson Davis Highway, Suite 1204, Arlington VA 22202-4302. Respondents should be aware that notwithstanding any other provision of law, no person shall be subject to a penalty for failing to comply with a collection of information if it does not display a currently valid OMB control number.

1. REPORT DATE <b>30 MAR 2007</b>	2. REPORT TYPE <b>Strategy Research Project</b>	3. DATES COVERED <b>00-00-2006 to 00-00-2007</b>
4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE <b>Carl Von Clausewitz and His Relevance as a Contemporary Theorist</b>		
5a. CONTRACT NUMBER  5b. GRANT NUMBER  5c. PROGRAM ELEMENT NUMBER		
6. AUTHOR(S) <b>Belinda Heerwagen</b>		
5d. PROJECT NUMBER  5e. TASK NUMBER  5f. WORK UNIT NUMBER		
7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) <b>U.S. Army War College,Carlisle Barracks,Carlisle,PA,17013-5050</b>		
8. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER		
9. SPONSORING/MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES)		
10. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S ACRONYM(S)		
11. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S REPORT NUMBER(S)		
12. DISTRIBUTION/AVAILABILITY STATEMENT <b>Approved for public release; distribution unlimited</b>		
13. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES		
14. ABSTRACT <b>See attached.</b>		
15. SUBJECT TERMS		
16. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF:		
a. REPORT <b>unclassified</b>	b. ABSTRACT <b>unclassified</b>	c. THIS PAGE <b>unclassified</b>
17. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT		
18. NUMBER OF PAGES <b>20</b>		
19a. NAME OF RESPONSIBLE PERSON		

## ABSTRACT

AUTHOR: Captain Belinda Heerwagen  
TITLE: Carl Von Clausewitz and His Relevance as a Contemporary Theorist  
FORMAT: Strategy Research Project  
DATE: 27 March 2007 WORD COUNT: 6449 PAGES: 20  
KEY TERMS: Fog and Friction, Genius of the Commander and Negotiation  
CLASSIFICATION: Unclassified

In the western world Carl Von Clausewitz may be cited more often than any other theorist of war and with good reason. His combination of experience and analytical rigor has allowed him to speak with a timeless voice throughout the ages.

In the early 21st century, when the means and methods of warfighting have dramatically changed since the time when Clausewitz wrote his seminal book On War, it is reasonable to question the relevance of his work to the contemporary warrior. Does Clausewitz speak to the modern soldier facing a world of terrorist tactics and asymmetrical threats? Does he deserve to have pride of place in the Western canon? Does his work deserve a central role in the curricula of contemporary war colleges?

The answer proffered here is a resounding, 'yes'. Indeed, Clausewitz's work may be more relevant than ever in an age of asymmetrical and non-conventional warfare. Provided, forthwith, is an examination of the most important aspects of Clausewitz's theories and their application to the continuing War on Terror. I have analyzed some of his major themes, including Fog and Friction, the Culminating Point of Victory, the Genius of the Commander and applied them to the contemporary strategic situation.



## CARL VON CLAUSEWITZ AND HIS RELEVANCE AS A CONTEMPORARY THEORIST

In the western world Carl Von Clausewitz may be cited more often than any other theorist of war and with good reason. His combination of experience and analytical rigor has allowed him to speak with a timeless voice throughout the ages.

In the early 21st century when the means and methods of warfighting have dramatically changed since the time when Clausewitz wrote his seminal book On War, it is reasonable to question the relevance of his work to the contemporary warrior. Does Clausewitz have much to say the modern soldier facing a world of terrorist tactics and asymmetrical threats? Does he deserve, still, to have pride of place in the Western canon? Does his work merit a central role in the curricula of contemporary staff and war colleges?

The answer proffered here is a resounding, 'yes'. Indeed, Clausewitz's work may be more relevant than ever in an age of asymmetrical and non-conventional warfare. Those contemplating modern war frequently dismiss the truisms formulated by past commentators as irrelevant or hopelessly out of date, when in fact there are many parallels to be drawn. Indeed, the ongoing Iraq War has served to highlight the continuing relevance of Clausewitzian thinking.

Provided forthwith is an examination of some of the most important aspects of Clausewitz's theories and their application to the continuing War on Terror. I have analyzed some of his major themes such as Fog and Friction, the Culminating Point of Victory, and the Genius of the Commander, and applied them to today's strategic situation.

### A Historical Perspective

Carl Von Clausewitz's legitimacy as an astute observer of war emanates from his extensive experience both on the battlefield and in the library. He was born the son of a Prussian lieutenant in 1781. Then, at the tender age of twelve, he was introduced to the bleak realities of war while serving in the Prussian army as a lance corporal. His homeland was engulfed in a war with France that would last twenty-three years and would leave an enduring impression on such an eager mind as his.

One of the prevailing lessons he learned early on was that war had no single standard of excellence or set of rules to follow, but rather, was a matter of chance, fraught with outside influences but dominated by politics.<sup>1</sup> In his writing, he would insist that the political aspect of war should never be forgotten when planning a campaign; indeed, the political aim should hold prominence in every aspect of planning.

In the latter half of the 1790's, as part of a regiment that included a member of the royal family, young Clausewitz was granted access to the library, opera and theater of Prince Henry, brother of Frederick the Great. Clausewitz's intellectual prowess, combined with the exposure to such cultural riches, would serve to spark a passion to be educated as well as to be an educator. As historian Peter Paret explained, "The ways in which abstractions might accurately reflect and convey reality, the manner in which men can be taught to understand the truth, and the ultimate purpose of education – which, he held, consisted not in the transmission of technical expertise but in the development of independent judgment – all came to be major considerations in Clausewitz's theoretical work."<sup>2</sup>

Then, in the early 1800's, Clausewitz graduated from Berlin's new War College at the head of his class. There, he met his future intellectual mentor and teacher, Gerhard Scharnhorst, who would shape Clausewitz's ideas about social and political interplay in war. Scharnhorst, a renowned scholar, soldier and politician, would guide Clausewitz's assertion that the theorist wishing to understand the state and the nature of war "must never allow his thoughts to diverge far from the element central to each – power in politics, violence in war."<sup>3</sup> Clausewitz would also gain insight and maturity of vision from studying the writings of noted theorists such as Heinrich von Bulow and Antoine Henri Jomini; from reading books such as De l'Esprit des Lois and Critique of Practical Reason; and from observing the tactical operations of Napoleon.<sup>4</sup> He recognized their contributions, studied their writings, contemplated their strategic genius, but still felt that existing theory lacked sufficient emphasis on the elements of human intelligence and will.

He read, studied, and challenged the great thinkers of his time, garnering credibility (and criticism) because of his pronounced belief in responsive reading and thinking. His writing spanned a decade, from 1815 as he gathered a collection of essays, until 1825 when he had completed six of his eight books and drafted the remaining two. In 1827, however, he began to expand and refine much of his manuscript, finishing only the first chapters of Book One.<sup>5</sup> Much like many great theorists, he was still intimately involved in development of thought and coalescing of ideas when he died while editing and revising his work. His untimely death during a cholera outbreak, brought an abrupt end to work that has been unrivaled in the West. Perhaps his continual inner struggle to provide a theory that could not be wrapped in a strict formulaic model gives Clausewitz that human quality that allows the modern student of war theory to identify and find relevance in On War and that same struggle gave his work timelessness. After all, today's environment of insurgencies, guerilla warfare and asymmetrical tactics is not amenable to formulaic responses.

## Clausewitzian Theory in the War on Terror/Iraq

Several of Clausewitz's principal ideas in On War are unquestionably applicable to the "Global War on Terror" (GWOT) declared by the Bush Administration after September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001. These include Clausewitz's principal ideas regarding: the nature of war; the duality of war (limited and unlimited war); the "Trinity" of war; the genius of the commander; centers of gravity; and fog and friction.<sup>6</sup> Those nations that have been victims of terror – orchestrated by Al-Qaeda and other groups – are still trying to define and understand the enemy they face. Within the War on Terror the enemy has many monikers - radical, inhumane, fascist, and elusive – and many methods, including irregular, asymmetric, and insurgent tactics. The GWOT 'enemy' is dispersed and global, possessing no permanent home address or headquarters. The enemy is ruthless, using humans as weapons or shields, employing suicide bombers and flagrantly abjuring international law, and yet Clausewitz's central themes on the nature of war are as applicable to the GWOT as they are to any so called "conventional" war.

### Understanding the Nature of War

First and foremost, Clausewitz charges that it is imperative to know the kind of war in which you are engaging. His two best-known (and frequently misunderstood) aphorisms from On War reveal his thoughts on the nature of war. The first cautions political leaders to deeply consider the nature of the war on which they are about to embark: "The first, supreme, the most far-reaching act of judgment that the statesman and commander have to make is to establish by that test the kind of war on which they are embarking; neither mistaking it for, nor trying to turn it into, something that is alien to its nature."<sup>7</sup> Although Clausewitz wrote this idea two hundred years ago, the events in Iraq are proving it to be as valid as ever. With respect to Iraq, the George W. Bush Administration failed to understand and identify the type of war they were entering, assuming it would be a short, high-technology, conventional war and failing to see what it might become, a complex, fourth generation unconventional netwar that is further morphing into something akin to a civil war. Moreover, the Administration did not fully appreciate the threat posed by a nascent insurgency or the complications associated with a disgruntled population who was willing to use asymmetric means. Nor did they recognize the unsettling effect of dismantling (in total) one regime (Sunni led) and attempting to replace it with another that the first regarded as threatening (composed of Shiites and/or Kurds). The Sunnies were well aware that they might be regarded as the 'enemy' for their past oppressive tactics toward the other two sects. Also, the assumption that Saddam's Republican Guard would be the main opponent (the Center of Gravity) and once eliminated, would render the country free of

'bad guys', was overly optimistic and simplistic. As Michael Gordon and Bernard Trainor pointed out in their book, Cobra II, the Fedayeen would step in as a worthy adversary in Nasiriyah, Samawah, Najaf, Kifl, and Diwaniyah, and within Baghdad.<sup>8</sup> The war in Iraq clearly demonstrates that understanding the animal you are attacking and its nature is paramount to choosing the correct weapon with which to destroy it. The Administration was caught with its proverbial 'pants down' when confronted with an unpredictable, opportunistic, and enterprising enemy that had no centralized operational base to attack and dismantle. In Iraq in 2003, the Bush Administration set out to fight a war it wanted to fight – on its own terms.

Clausewitz's second well-known aphorism on the nature of war states that, "War is the continuation of policy by another means."<sup>9</sup> On this count, the Bush Administration is, at least, on somewhat firmer ground. The administration has argued forcefully and consistently that its military campaigns in Iraq, Afghanistan and elsewhere, are part of a broader, wide-ranging attack on global terrorism that includes diplomatic, informational, military, and economic elements. The current military campaigns are plainly an extension of United States policy, and are therefore consistent with Clausewitz's (wholly relevant) dictum. In Iraq however, there was a failure on the part of the war planners and the Administration to adequately address the political endstate. As Gordon and Trainor pointed out in Cobra II: "The Administration convinced itself that it could dislodge the regime without having a well thought out plan to rebuild or fill the vacuum regime dismantlement would create; and Bush, Cheney, Rumsfeld and Franks spent most of their time and energy on the least demanding task – defeating Saddam's weakened conventional forces – and the least amount on the most demanding – rehabilitation of and security for the new Iraq."<sup>10</sup>

On War is not, as many might speculate, a playbook. It is, rather, a work that explains the nature of war and how war interacts with political objectives. Those passages which deal principally with the tactics of war, while interesting, have stood the test of time with varying degrees of success. Indeed, were the book solely a compendium of tactical discussions on the "how to" of waging war, it would now almost certainly be obsolete. The parts of the book that are timeless, and that resonate today, are Clausewitz's philosophical insights into the nature of war.

Contemporary strategists or warfighters examining the modern wars of the 19<sup>th</sup>, 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries should have no problem identifying the relevancy of Clausewitz's writings because of the conventional nature of the conflicts conducted therein. Even in the cold war (which of all modern wars may be the hardest to find direct correlations to Clausewitz's theories) there existed two discernable enemies, along with their allies, militaries, etc. These forces

sought to achieve political aims, in part, through the application of military power. The nuclear debate was in full bloom with the question of deterrence and its effects, and yet, the famed Clausewitzian trinity of the government, the army, and the people stood like a “sword in the stone” of Clausewitzian warfare philosophy. The two superpowers jockeyed for position and tried to exert their political influence in the global arena. Both countries were: 1) concerned about their political aims proportionate to the possible advent of war; and 2) occupied with the fog and friction of determining the enemy’s will. Moreover, the cold war frequently went “hot” and was played out through forms of conventional warfare. During the Bay of Pigs, the Cuban Missile Crisis, and the Vietnam War, the relevance of Clausewitz’s work was apparent.

### Limited versus unlimited war

In On War, Clausewitz first describes absolute, ideal, or what has become known as “total” war, wherein the full resources of a nation are committed to waging war. Having established the idea of total war as a theoretical construct that cannot be attained in reality, he demonstrates how, in practice, warfare departs from the absolute. In so doing, he develops the concept of other-than-total, or limited war, wherein a nation wages war with something less than its full resources, and with aims that are something other than the complete annihilation of one’s enemy. Still, in limited war, as with all war, victory is achieved when one’s enemy has been compelled to do one’s will and one’s political objectives have been met. As concerns the War on Terror, the most radical elements (called the ‘enemy’ for simplicity) clearly view the contest as total or unlimited war – seeing an existential battle without end. Adherents of radical Islam hold that the West must be destroyed and an Islamic caliphate erected in its stead.

The question for American (and allied) strategists is, “How do we react?” Can we effectively hold on to our morays and ethical beliefs and still defeat this enemy that lacks any sense of restraint or adherence to the principle of discrimination? Clausewitz captures the dilemma precisely when he states: “If one side uses force without compunction, undeterred by the bloodshed it involves, while the other side refrains, the first will gain the upper hand.”<sup>11</sup> The War on Terror enemy, whether they be Baathist loyalists in Iraq, Sunni or Shia fundamentalists, or Al-Qaeda, tactically seek to wear Americans down by continually attacking them in small numbers – what Clausewitz called ‘countless minor incidents’<sup>12</sup> – and to erode our will by making the war a protracted, well publicized event that focuses on body counts. This enemy seeks to bring America to its knees not by using large conventional style weaponry, but instead by wielding a bayonet (suicide bombers and improvised explosives devices) that tears at the spirit.

For many years American planners believed that adherents to radical Islam could be negotiated with and cajoled into comporting with international law and norms. September 11th changed that paradigm. In the wake of the attacks, the Bush Administration moved United States policy more squarely into the realm of the unlimited spectrum of force. The United States' aims are certainly now unlimited: Radical Islam's adherents, to the extent they are avowed terrorists, are to be destroyed. And yet the Bush Administration has not waged the War on Terror in an unlimited way. The United States has not marshaled all of the human or economic resources at its disposal to fight the war. Conversely, the American public was encouraged to 'go shopping' in the wake of the Twin Tower attack and there is little today to jog the public consciousness into feeling the immediacy of war. The U.S. Army and Marine Corps are carrying the bulk of the burden; most Americans feel virtually no effect at all from the War. In sharp contrast to World War II or even Vietnam, the United States populace does not feel the effects of this global war in any consequential way. It may be reasonably argued therefore, that there exists a strategy-policy mismatch between the Bush administration's aims and the level of effort it is employing to achieve them – a chasm between what is said and what is, in fact, done.

In Clausewitzian terms, the United States is not fighting its self-professed unlimited war on terror with a "maximum exertion of strength".<sup>13</sup> The President's 10 January, 2007 speech on the Iraq War, however, seemed to be an attempt to correct this mismatch in scope on the operational level. Addressing United States military operations, the President acknowledged:

Our past efforts to secure Bagdad failed for two principal reasons: (1) there were not enough Iraqi and American troops to secure neighborhoods that had been cleared of terrorists and insurgents, and (2) there were too many restrictions on the troops we did have... In earlier operations, Iraqi and American forces cleared many neighborhoods of terrorists and insurgents, but when our forces moved on to other targets, the killers returned. This time, we'll have the force levels we need to hold the areas that have been cleared. In earlier operations, political and sectarian interference prevented Iraqi and American forces from going into neighborhoods that are home to those fueling the sectarian violence. This time Iraqi and American forces will have a green light to enter those neighborhoods – and Prime Minister Maliki has pledged that political or sectarian interference will not be tolerated.<sup>14</sup>

Similarly, the President's approach to fighting the insurgency has taken a more unlimited tone, adding that, "Succeeding in Iraq also required defending its territorial integrity and stabilizing the region in the face of extremist challenges." Likewise, he took a more unlimited view when he expanded the United States reach and included Iran and Syria as co-conspirators, stating, "These two regimes are allowing terrorists and insurgents to use their territory to move in and out of Iraq... We will disrupt the attacks on our forces. We'll interrupt

the flow of support from Iran and Syria. And we will seek out and destroy the networks providing advanced weaponry and training to our enemies in Iraq.”<sup>15</sup> But the question remains: Is it too late to make these corrections? Are these efforts too little, too late when considering the will of the people? One major problem the Bush Administration faces is that it has had no moment (aside from May 2003) when it could claim victory. After the ‘victory shout’ in 2003, Iraq fell into chaos rather quickly and it was obvious that regime change may have created more problems than it had solved. Moreover, the ‘change’ may have provided the ideal opportunity for the insurgents to gain the advantage. Here we can hear Clausewitz’s asserting, through the centuries, that the ultimate outcome of a war is not always to be regarded as final: “The defeated state (group) often considers the outcome merely as a transitory evil, for which a remedy may still be found...”<sup>16</sup> Creating problems is the antithesis of good strategy, the Bush Administration is facing a very real dilemma because of the many miscalculations it made in planning and executing the first stages of the War in Iraq.

Clausewitz again describes the nature of war in dual terms when discussing aims. War, he states, may either be (1) “waged with the aim of completely defeating the enemy, in order either to destroy him as a political organism or to force him to accept any terms whatever”; or (2) “waged to acquire territory in order to retain the conquest or to bargain with the occupied land in the peace negotiations”.<sup>17</sup> In the case of the Iraq war, the United States waged war to change the Iraqi regime, not to seize or conquer Iraqi territory. If, however, war is the continuation of politics by other means, the United States proclaimed victory over Saddam’s political and conventional forces is a partial victory at best. Victory in Iraq can only be gauged in terms of the degree to which the United States’ original political aims were realized. If, as the Bush administration maintained, one of the chief aims of the war was to bring democracy to the Iraqi people, then victory in Iraq has not been achieved. Also, if the Administration’s perception of a democratic government includes security and stability and not just a successful election, then the idea of victory is elusive on those grounds as well. In fact, it is clear that the Administration is still unclear as to what it will accept as an endpoint. Clausewitz states that “in war the result is never final”.<sup>18</sup> In Afghanistan, for example, initial, spectacular, successes against the Taliban have recently been undermined. The Taliban viewed their initial “defeat” as merely a “transitory evil for which remedy may still be found...at a later date.”<sup>19</sup> For the United States’ GWOT to succeed, its political leaders and statesmen must understand not only the nature of the enemy but also must recognize that short term victories do not guarantee long term success.

### The Clausewitzian Trinity

One of the most important theories espoused in On War is the famous Clausewitzian “Trinity”. According to Clausewitz, there are three factors at play in war: 1) primordial violence, hatred and enmity which are natural forces; 2) chance and probability which exist in the creative spirit; and 3) war’s subordination as an instrument of policy which make war subject to reason. He goes on to relate these factors to the people, the commander and his army, and the government, respectively.<sup>20</sup> People will tend towards violence when faced with ideas differing from their own; the commander must use his creative genius when faced with the unknowns of war; and the government must ensure that the people and the commander are following the established guidelines (policy) most beneficial to the people.

Regarding the War on Terror, the question arises: How does one apply the framework of Clausewitz’s Trinity to a stateless, amorphous enemy? While a re-categorization is not perfect, there are new categories that can substitute successfully for the ones Clausewitz used in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The “commander and his army” may be described as the sum total of adherents to radical Islam willing to take up arms against the United States and its allies. The “government” may be described as those self-styled leaders of various radical Islamic movements. In this way, the War on Terror enemy, despite its inherently nebulous nature and the absence of a true nation state (in Westphalian terms), may be viewed within the Clausewitzian theoretical construct. For today’s policymakers to effectively wage the GWOT, they must develop strategies for addressing, or attacking, each side of the triad. With regard to the GWOT enemy (people), the United States must find a way to dissuade followers of Islam from adhering to the religion’s more virulent strains. Perhaps by effectively enacting a plan to harness the power of global partners banding together to cry out against terrorism, the United States can drain such organizations of their energy and legitimacy. Economic incentives and diplomatic measures are other ways that the Administration may affect outcomes. Regarding the “commander and his army”, the United States must develop strategies to convince those willing to take up arms against coalition forces or, indeed, against their Islamic brethren, to either lay them down or be killed. Finally, regarding the “government”, the United States must develop strategies to capture or kill those purporting to lead radical Islamic elements, to disrupt their networks, and to starve them of funding.

In establishing his Trinity Clausewitz gives credence to the idea that, at any given time, one element may play a more dominant role than the other two, but that all three sides must be considered when formulating effective strategies for defeating one’s enemy. Clausewitz argues that in guerrilla wars (of the type we are now seeing in Iraq) the “people” element of the triad

takes precedence over the other two.<sup>21</sup> Similarly, it may be argued that the most important element for United States policymakers to consider in the war on terror is the passion of the mass of people who adhere to radical Islam. This is, of course, further complicated by the infighting of one sect against another. The GWOT cannot be won unless or until the number of people who believe in radical Islam's central tenets – namely its antipathy toward Western values – is greatly reduced, or until they can be persuaded to eschew violent means. Only after the number of adherents to radical Islam is made negligible will the threat posed to Western societies be mitigated. As the United States has discovered in Iraq, the war against extremists cannot be won solely by killing "x" number of people. For the United States to prevail in the War on Terror, it must employ a broad-based strategy that addresses the root causes of radical Islam's appeal to its adherents. There are some who argue that the United States cannot bring this about on its own. Indeed, they believe that the War on Terror may be more properly viewed as a struggle between moderate and radical Islam for which the United States can play only an ancillary role.

It is also interesting to turn the mirror of the Trinity toward the United States and apply it to our own delicate balance between people, government and army. This 'triangle' allows us to focus analysis and reflection not only on our enemies and their evils, but upon ourselves and our own inward roots of dysfunction. Here, we see an administration, which until recently, was deaf to the voices of an uncertain people. The Bush Administration simply did not anticipate that the same people who seemed to be fully behind the War in Iraq would increasingly turn against it as time passed.

We see an Army (and Marine Corps) that, because of early misjudgments and inflexible government policy, has suffered disproportionately. Both services are bearing the strain of public disapproval of the War and an operational tempo that has stretched their resources thin. The U.S. triangle, therefore, is obtuse, with the government's 'leg' overrunning the others and falling pitifully short of Clausewitz's dictum that each side must be carefully balanced. He would reprimand the Administration for underestimating the possibility of resistance, friction, and chaos; he would counsel them that it is as important to consider one's own people and army as it is to consider the enemy's.

### Centers of Gravity

Another important theory raised by Clausewitz in On War is his idea of centers of gravity. According to Clausewitz, "one must keep the dominant characteristics of both belligerents in mind. Out of these characteristics a certain center of gravity develops, the hub of all power and

movement, on which everything depends. That is the point against all our energies should be directed.”<sup>22</sup> In describing centers of gravity, Clausewitz devotes much attention to the importance of major, i.e. large scale, battles. According to Clausewitz, “the major battle is therefore to be regarded as concentrated war, as the center of gravity of the entire conflict.”<sup>23</sup> It may be a mistake, however, for today’s policymakers to unquestioningly agree with Clausewitz’s emphasis on the battle when formulating strategies to win the GWOT. A more nuanced reading of Clausewitz, however, reveals his belief that in wars akin to popular uprisings, the center of gravity resides in the leadership’s charisma and its effect on public opinion.<sup>24</sup> If, therefore, the GWOT is viewed as a global popular uprising by adherents to radical Islam, the center of gravity shifts from large scale battles to, more properly, winning hearts and minds of the mass of people devoted to radical Islam.

As we have seen in Iraq, efforts against traditional Clausewitzian centers of gravity, such as capital cities and enemy armies, have not led to discernable progress, let alone victory, in the War on Terror. Regarding Al-Qaeda, there are many who believe that merely capturing the movement’s leader, Osama Bin Laden, will not substantively affect Al-Qaeda’s effectiveness. Clearly, the need to properly identify and target the GWOT center of gravity is of paramount importance when waging the GWOT. According to Clausewitz, once the center of gravity is identified, the strategist must ensure it is attacked continually without giving the enemy time to recover: “Blow after blow must be aimed in the same direction, as ...only...by constantly seeking out the center of his power, will one really defeat the enemy.”<sup>25</sup>

When attacking an enemy’s center of gravity, speed, focused consistency of effort, and ongoing reevaluation are imperative. In the GWOT, a conventional battlefield is lacking. Speed therefore must come in the form of continuous assessment and reassessment, modularity of effort, and movement to areas of conflict. When Clausewitz talks about multiple blows in the same direction, he is talking about continuity of effort of any sort; he does not mean merely arrows, bullets or bombs falling in the same geographical location. For example, with the radical Islamic faction, we could continually attempt to reach the hearts and minds of the Iraqi people by employing facets of soft power and theater security cooperation, such as humanitarian aid, education, and economic assistance to dissuade those who seek refuge in radical ideologies. In sum, the strategist may still embrace Clausewitz’s idea of centers of gravity, but must translate the concept so that it fits a new set of circumstances.

### The Genius of the Commander (And the 'Art' Of Negotiation)

Now we must consider the Commander operating in today's complex environment. The contemporary military officer must be, perhaps more so today than at any time in modern history, able to solve complex geopolitical problems by using good judgment while negotiating with a wide range of civilian leaders and governmental and non-governmental foreign and domestic agencies. His/her operational field is global in nature, and therefore, it is critically important that he/she be skilled at the art of negotiation as well as the art of war. Moreover, as "Negotiation Warriors," senior military officers, junior officers and even enlisted personnel must be as familiar with the strategy and tactics of negotiating as they are with the application of military force on the battlefield.

Carl Von Clausewitz advises those thinking of embarking on war first consider what they hope to achieve; "The first, the supreme, the most far-reaching act of judgment that the statesman and commander have to make is to establish by that test the kind of war on which they are embarking; neither mistaking it for, nor trying to turn it into, something that is alien to its nature."<sup>26</sup> Thus, in Iraq, it is critically important for the senior officer be able to communicate with the Sunni official and for the army sergeant to be skilled enough to negotiate with the local Iraqi citizen on the street corner.

Also, the emotional attachment to one's objective must be removed, a rational assessment of the problem must be made, and an adaptable view of what constitutes an acceptable terminating point must become the primary focus. Instead of fixating on "winning", the negotiator focuses on creating and attaining value through assessing 'common ground'.<sup>27</sup> Still, to maximize the likelihood that negotiations will end in success, the negotiation warrior must make every effort to understand what his opponent seeks to achieve. The Bush Administration has recognized its failings and is now scrambling to correct its original miscalculations.

If leaders were attentive to Clausewitz's theories they would glean that success on the battlefield depends to a large degree on genius – what Clausewitz termed 'coup d'oeil': an ability to assess a situation quickly and correctly. This ability relies heavily on the Commander's innate intuition. Successful strategic negotiators must be acutely aware of their "terrain", and the most successful have an almost uncanny ability to sense their opponent's tack and respond quickly, whether through experience or innate ability. Roger Fisher and William Ury in their book, Getting to Yes, tell us that the skilled negotiation warrior is filled with empathy for the opponent and therefore realizes that "understanding their point of view is not the same as agreeing with it." In fact, it is beneficial, "...and allows you to reduce the area of conflict and

advance your newly enlightened self-interest.”<sup>28</sup> Instead of considering victory in unilateral terms, the mature negotiator must adeptly sew his thoughts and desires together to convince others to willingly make the garment that he desires even when it is not in their interest to do so. Recognizing the posture of the opponent, their body language and voice inflection for example, can provide important clues that hint at the opponent’s psychological state and provide the fabric for productive communication even in the most contentious circumstances. Also, the study of cultural tenets prepares the artful negotiator with critical knowledge that he will use when assessing the terrain and meeting on the battlefield of negotiation.

Many argue that, in Iraq, the United States was brandishing its form of democracy as the political gold standard without consideration of history and culture. The genius of the commander is therefore a mix of intuitive knowledge and understanding gained through experience and deliberate planning. Clausewitz succinctly captures this unique ability when he argues that the Commander must have an “intellect that, even in the darkest hour, retains some glimmerings of the inner light which leads to truth.”<sup>29</sup> Nowhere is this more aptly illustrated than in the throes of negotiation - either in the streets of Baghdad, the Oval Office, or in the halls of the United Nations.

Clausewitz, once again, provides wisdom to the negotiator on what constitutes victory. Although many who are somewhat familiar with his theories of war would assume he holds an absolute view of victory or defeat, in his chapter on the culminating point of victory he proffers a more guarded, and nuanced, viewpoint: “It is not possible in every war for the victor to overthrow his enemy completely.” And, later in the same chapter he adds: “Thus the superiority one has or gains in war is only the means and not the end; it must be risked for the sake of the end. But one must know the point to which it can be carried in order not to overshoot the target; otherwise instead of gaining new advantages, one will disgrace oneself.”<sup>30</sup> Clausewitz seems to urge the negotiator to remain humble and take a quiet approach to the blinding brilliance of victory. He warns that one’s defeated enemy may be waiting for a more advantageous time, and higher ground, to return to the battlefield. Certainly, as insurgents move in and out of supposedly subjugated neighborhoods and regions within Iraq, Clausewitz’s wisdom is once again brought to the fore.

The art of negotiation is a learned skill for most strategic leaders and an instinctive skill for the very few. Regardless of their innate level of negotiating proficiency, military officers will unquestionably be engaged in strategic decision-making and geopolitical horse-trading that demands they possess the highest possible level of negotiating skill. They must, therefore, do all that they can to master the art of negotiation and become negotiation warriors prior to assuming

elevated rank. To sharpen their negotiation skills senior military leaders may look to extant war theories with which they are already familiar for insight into how best to conduct negotiations. Clausewitz provides substantive commentary and valuable guidance for the negotiation warrior. Armed with his words of wisdom, the resourceful student of negotiation will find it possible to shift successfully from the battlefield to the political or corporate negotiation environment.

### Friction in War

Clausewitz identifies an additional concept that is crucial to the strategist's understanding of war: Friction. According to Clausewitz, "the conduct of war resembles the workings of an intricate machine with tremendous friction, so that combinations which are easily planned on paper can be executed only with great effort."<sup>31</sup> Friction is "the force that makes the apparently easy so difficult."<sup>32</sup> Importantly, friction exists not only at the tactical but at the strategic level. It describes not only the difficulty associated with waging war, but also of assessing the effectiveness of one's own strategy and reformulating new strategies as the war unfolds. Owing almost entirely to friction the who, what, where and how questions become increasingly difficult to answer as a war progresses. Who is the enemy? How do we negotiate for the greatest good? Who is the target? What is their ultimate political aim? What is their trinity? What is the enemy's center(s) of gravity? How do we target it? These questions may be a simplified version of what the modern strategist is asking, but the subject is complex and the answers are elusive, multi-layered and most importantly, ever changing.

In the chapter of On War titled *Strategy*, Clausewitz addresses the idea of planning strategy: "Since most of these matters have to be based on assumptions that may not prove correct, while other, more detailed orders cannot be determined in advance at all, it follows that the strategist must go on campaign himself. Detailed orders can then be given on the spot, allowing the general plan to be adjusted to the modifications that are continuously required."<sup>33</sup> He could not be more correct. The genius of the Commander and his ability to employ operational art is no where more critical than when faced with the tyranny of Friction. The guerrilla tactics used by the insurgents in Iraq, for example, demand that the Commander be constantly reassessing strategic options and remaining consistently flexible. He must be able to adjust his strategy quickly and apply nuance to a general plan, in order to suit the type of threat encountered. There is little question that the Bush Administration inadequately anticipated friction – in its many forms – in the initial planning phase of the Iraq campaign and its Phase IV planning in both Afghanistan and Iraq. Not only did the Administration deny the true nature of the war, but they locked themselves into a "clean and tidy" mindset that largely dismissed the

idea of Friction. One thing remains certain, if we are to defeat terrorism, there must be a continual attempt to adjust the strategic plan and assess the who, what, where and how questions with speed, intelligence, and discernment.

### Conclusion

Iraq and the War on Terror have inspired many journalists, politicians, and everyday citizens to reflect on what constitutes the fabric of war. Often times, those contemplating modern war reflexively dismiss the truisms formulated by past commentators on war as irrelevant or hopelessly out of date. However, the modern warrior can find plenty of wisdom and guidance by turning to Clausewitz's classic text, On War. In fact, the principal theories espoused by Clausewitz are not only relevant, they provide today's policymakers and warfighters, who are charged with winning the War on Terror, a crucial framework for developing effective strategic options. Gleaning insights from Clausewitz requires that readers avoid approaching his text in a piecemeal and perfunctory way. To truly benefit from Clausewitz's insights into the nature and effective conduct of war, policymakers must read On War carefully, and with an eye toward avoiding fortune cookie interpretations. Carefully studied, however, On War provides innumerable, uncannily accurate insights into the nature of war using soft and hard methods. Clausewitz warns of the pitfalls that await policymakers who ignore war's inherent characteristics and the admonitions to policymakers elucidated by Clausewitz possess a prescience that is unparalleled.

Clausewitz is a unique and complex individual whose wisdom has a timeless quality because he speaks from his experience, both as a scholar and a soldier. No policymaker should plan a war without reading his famous words, "No one starts a war, or ought to, without first being clear in his mind what he intends to achieve by that war and how he intends to conduct it."<sup>34</sup>

### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Carl Von Clausewitz, On War (Princeton University Press, Princeton, New Jersey, 1976), edited and translated by Michael Howard and Peter Paret, p. 5 (here and after On War).

<sup>2</sup> On War, p. 8

<sup>3</sup> On War, p. 9

<sup>4</sup> On War, p. 10

<sup>5</sup> On War, p. 4

<sup>6</sup> On War, p. 87

<sup>7</sup> On War, pp. 88-89

<sup>8</sup> Michael R. Gordon and General Bernard E. Trainor, Cobra II (Pantheon Books, New York, 2006), p. 498

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Cobra II, p. 503

<sup>11</sup> On War, p. 75

<sup>12</sup> On War, p.119

<sup>13</sup> On War, p. 77

<sup>14</sup> President's Address to the Nation, [www.whitehouse.gov](http://www.whitehouse.gov), January 10, 2007

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> On War, p. 80

<sup>17</sup> On War, p. 97

<sup>18</sup> On War, p. 80

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> On War, p. 89

<sup>21</sup> Michael I Handel, Masters of War (Frank Cass Publishers, Great Britain, 2001), p. 103

<sup>22</sup> On War, pp. 595-6

<sup>23</sup> On War, p. 258

<sup>24</sup> On War, p. 596

<sup>25</sup> On War, p.54

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> George J. Woods, "Some Terminology and Definitions used in Negotiation Circles" (unpublished course material, US Army War College), p. 375

<sup>28</sup> Roger Fisher and William Ury, Getting to Yes (Penguin Books, New York, 1991), p.24

<sup>29</sup> On War, p. 102

<sup>30</sup> On War, p. 566, 570

<sup>31</sup> On War, p. 17

<sup>32</sup> On War, p. 121

<sup>33</sup> On War, p. 177

<sup>34</sup> On War, p. 579